

From the Southern Christian Herald.

"On the correct interpretation of the Scriptures."

Mr. Editor: Permit me to offer through your valuable periodical a few remarks on an important passage in 1st Epistle of Peter, 3 ch. 18th 19th and 20th verses.

"For Christ also hath once suffered for sin, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit: by which, also he went and preached unto the spirits in prison; which sometime were disobedient when once the long suffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was preparing, wherein, in few, that is, eight souls, were saved by water."

Dr. Doddridge remarks of this passage in his Family Expositor that, "Hardly any passage has been more differently interpreted than this, especially the phrase, 'by which also he (that is Christ) went and preached unto the spirits in prison,' which sometime were disobedient when once the long suffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was preparing." Some understand it of souls, who were in some lower place in Paradise, or in a watch tower, waiting the Redeemers coming: Others, of those in Hell, whom he delivered, to grace his triumph. See Dr. Moore's Theological work, p. 18, Bishop Pearson on the Creed, p. 228, Dr. Doddridge himself in his Paraphrase thinks it means, Christ spiritually preaching by Noah, to sinners in his day, who rejecting the truth and being disobedient were lost and are now spirits in the prison of woe and despair—and this appears to be the more common interpretation, and such is the view given of it, by a late writer in the Charleston Observer.

The Romish doctrine of Purgatory, looks mainly to this portion of Scripture for its support, if I mistake not. Henry and Scott, in their commentaries coincide with the opinion expressed by Dr. Doddridge. To differ from such men of God, may seem presumptuous at this day, yet I would, with great humility suggest an interpretation which to me seems at least a plausible one and new, if more incorrect than the former. My great objection to its meaning, "The spirits of antediluvian rebels, now in prison" is the want of a word in the original for the term now.

Christ "being put to death in the flesh but quickened by the spirit; by which, (Spirit) also he went and preached to the spirits in prison"—"in the days of Noah"—Doth it mean that the Saviour personally went and preached to the spirits in prison?

No: But by Noah a preacher of righteousness, he went and preached to sinners, whose state and character is figuratively represented by the expression, "Spirits in Prison."

This same Apostle in his 2nd Epistle, 1st ch. last verse, says: "For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but Holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost," and again in his 1st Epistle, 1st ch. 10th and 11th verses he says, "Of which salvation the Prophets have inquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you; searching what, or what manner of time, the Spirit of Christ which was in them, did signify, when it testified before hand the sufferings of Christ and the Glory that should follow." It is evident from these two passages that "the Holy Ghost and the Spirit of Christ," are regarded by the Apostle Peter, as the self same Spirit; one Spirit, by which, when Jesus was put to death in the flesh, he was quickened—made alive; And by which before he became incarnate, he went and preached through Noah, to rebel sinners.

As to the correctness of the interpretation I would give to the phrase—"Spirits in Prison," I will quote but a single passage—Isaiah 61 ch. 1st verse—"The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me; because the Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek: he hath sent me to bind up the broken hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound."

Now when many hundred years had passed away from the time this was uttered by the Prophet Isaiah, after that the Son of God became incarnate, he read this passage of Scripture in a Synagogue and closing the book and looking around on his attentive audience "he began to say unto them this day is this Scripture fulfilled in your ears"—Luke, 4th ch. 21st verse.

So then Christ did in person proclaim to the Jews, "liberty to the captives and the opening of the prison to them that were bound." "Captives sold under sin," imprisoned in ignorance, and unbelief.

The foregoing interpretation seems to me natural and relieves the passage of scripture from the many difficulties attending the other modes of explanation. If there be objection to this exposition on the part of any of your Christian readers the writer of this article, would be glad to see them offered in your paper. Knox.

#### THE SEVEN SLEEPING CHRISTIANS.

In a volume of sermons by Bishop Heber, he introduces one of the discourses with this story, for the purpose of calling attention to the great concerns of eternity and of practical religion. His text is, 2 Cor. iv. 18. "We look not at things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen."

"There is an ancient fable, told by the Greek and Roman churches—which, fable as it is, may, for its beauty and singularity, well deserve to be remembered—that in one of the earliest persecutions to which the Christian world was exposed, seven Christian youths sought concealment in a lonely cave; and there, by God's appointment, fell into a deep and death-like slumber. They slept, the legend runs, two hundred years, till the greater part of mankind had received the faith of the gospel, and that church, which they had left a poor and afflicted orphan, had kings for her fathers, and queens for her nursing mothers." They then awoke,

awoke, and entering into their native Ephesus, so altered now that its streets were altogether unknown to them, they cautiously inquired if there were any Christians in that city! "Christians!" was the answer, "we are all Christians here!" and they heard with thankful joy the change which, since they left the world, had taken place in the opinions of its inhabitants. On one side, they were shown a stately fabric, adorned with a guided cross, and dedicated, as they were told, to the worship of their crucified Master; on another, schools for the public exposition of those gospels, of which, so short a time before, the bare profession was proscribed and deadly. But no fear was now to be entertained of those miseries which had encircled the cradle of Christianity; no danger now of the rack, the flogs, or the sword; the emperor and his prefects held the same faith with themselves, and all the wealth of the east, and all the valor and authority of the western world, were exerted to protect and endow the professors and the teachers of their religion.

"But joyful as these tidings must at first have been, their further inquiries are said to have met with answers which very deeply surprised and pained them. They learned that the greater part of those who called themselves by the name of Christ were strangely regardless of the blessings which Christ had bestowed, and of the obligations which he had laid on his followers. They found that, as the world had become Christian, Christianity itself had become worldly; and, wearied and sorrowful, they besought of God to lay them down asleep again, crying out to those who followed them, 'You have shown us many heathens, who have given up their old idolatry, without gaining anything better in its room; many who are of no religion at all; and many with whom the religion of Christ is no more than a cloak of licentiousness, but where, where are the Christians?' And thus they returned to their cave, and there God had compassion on them, releasing them, once for all, from that world for whose reproof their days had been lengthened, and removing their souls to the society of their ancient friends and pastors, the martyrs and saints of an earlier and a better generation."

#### THE CHRISTIAN SPIRIT.

It was the noble determination of St. Paul to spend and be spent for Christ. This was not the passionate resolve of one wrought up to a high degree of excitement, but his ordinary temper and disposition—the natural and spontaneous production of grace in his heart. Such is the disposition of every one, who feels that his heart had been dilated by the Spirit of God, and a holy impulse given to his actions. The spirit of Christianity is utterly opposed to that narrowness of soul, which immures itself within itself, and measures the claims of others by the personal inconvenience or benefit which will accrue to the individual whose aid is invoked. This is not the spirit of Christ—it has a selfishness and sordidness about it, which can find no congenial element in the victim of the cross, nor in that benevolence which impregates the very air we breathe, and prepares our daily comforts and enjoyments.

He who has felt the love of God shed abroad in his heart, feels that there are cords many fold, and strong binding him to his Redeemer, and motives irresistible, urging him to live for Christ. His cause is the Christian's cause. His soul feels the thrill of delight at its triumphs, and mourns when the adversary prevails. For this he plans, and labors, and pleads, bestows his treasure and offers up his prayers. The field of his vision is the kingdom of Christ—his inquiries and efforts are circumscribed by no other limits than the wants of man, and the promise of usefulness. Has he by assuming the vows of the sacraments entered fully within the pale of the church? It was not to enjoy inglorious sloth, but that he might be a laborer in the Lord's vineyard. Has he consecrated all that he has to his Saviour? It was not that they should be wasted in self-indulgence, or hoarded up to rust in uselessness, but that they might be employed in promoting the glory of God and good of men. He and they are to spend and be spent for Christ. This determination will lead him to advance every scheme by which God may be honored—to watch with solicitude the openings of Providence, and eagerly to embrace every opportunity of doing something in the great cause.

There are secular employments and temporal duties not to be neglected, which religion enjoins us to discharge with fidelity and punctuality. But the great business of the Christian in this world is to live for eternity—the main objects of this life have reference to the kingdom of God. If our first concern be to amass wealth, or take care of it, to secure all the comforts which we desire for ourselves and our families, or to gratify some other passion whose influence may control us, and we give to religion and the soul only fragments of time, and fractions of money, which can be spared without imposing any degree of constraint upon ourselves, are we living for ourselves or God. Are we not exhausting life in the pursuit of that which is unworthy such devotion? Do we not sacrifice our greater interests for the less? How little satisfaction will be felt by us when at the close of life we shall be compelled to review our course, and discover that although bound by solemn engagements to spend and be spent for Christ, we have devoted our affections, our powers, and all our efforts to secular concerns. We may have amassed those perishing riches which God may make a curse instead of a blessing to our offspring; and feel that for this sordid portion we have been traitors to our Benefactor, and sold our souls to death.—Southern Churchman.

The Virginia Conference Sentinel in noticing the Seventeenth annual report of the Missionary Society of the Methodist Episcopal church, says:

"There are, under the care of the Society, twelve foreign and aboriginal Missionary Stations, on which there are 48 missionaries, 3,752 church members, 80 teachers, and 911

scholars. There are Domestic Missions in 21 of the annual conferences in which there are 17,174 church members, and 118 missionaries. Among the slaves in South Carolina there are 1,710 children under a course of catechetical instruction.

"The treasurer's report presents \$61,337 81 as the aggregate amount received during the year, being \$22,502 19 above what was collected during the preceding year; expended \$55,085 85."

Extract from a work by Dr. Burgess, of England, entitled Greece and the Levant, in 1834. The most interesting object now in Athens is doubtless the American Missionary School, which, for the last four or five years, has been conducted by Mrs. Hill. The school house entirely built by the Americans, is an edifice of stone, and stands in the very agora or market-place where Paul disputed daily with those that met him. Yesterday morning, being Sunday, I was invited by Mr. Hill to go and see the juvenile assembly in its best order. The infant school is conducted in the same manner as our own in England. I have no time now to offer you any reflections upon this effort of Christian zeal. I can only say it filled my mind with great delight, and appeared to me to open a cheering prospect for the future destiny of Athens.

"After this interesting visit, I proceeded to the house of the Missionary, and had the satisfaction of performing divine service and preaching to a congregation of about twenty persons. The audience consisted of a few British travellers like ourselves, a few Philhellens, who have established themselves at Athens, the household of Mr. and Mrs. Hill, and two or three of his assistant teachers, who understand English. Can you conceive any thing more joyful than such an occupation as this, within view of Mars' Hill? Besides, I am one of those who believe that the Gospel is seldom preached in vain."

#### MINISTERIAL FIDELITY.

Remarkable and important is that saying—*Let us have grace whereby we may serve God acceptably, with reverence and godly fear; for our God is a consuming fire.* Very observable also is the language of David: *I will go to the altar of God, to God my exceeding joy.* May the import of these passages united, exert its force on your very soul, whenever you take the lead in public worship! Then your graces as a Christian, and your gifts as a minister, will be exercised at the same time. Your graces being excited, you have communion with God; your gifts being exerted, the people are edified. Whereas, were you to enter the pulpit merely to exercise your ministerial talents, though others might be fed by the truths delivered, your own soul would starve. This, I fear, is the case of many who preach the gospel.

But what a figure in the eye of Omniscience must that preacher make, who is not habitually desirous of exercising devout affections in the performance of his public work! Like an index on the high road, he directs others in the way to heaven, but he walks not in it himself. He may profess with Balaam, or preach with Judas; his learning and knowledge, his natural parts and spiritual gifts, may excite admiration and be useful to others; but, being destitute of internal devotion, his heart is not right with God, and he is a wretched creature. *Sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal*, is the character by which he is known in sacred Scripture.

When, however, commencing public service, it is needful to remember that you appear not only as a worshipper of God, but as a minister of Christ. Being such, it is your indispensable duty to preach Christ and not yourself; that is, with sincerity and ardor, to aim at displaying the glories of his person and the riches of his grace, the spirituality of his kingdom and the excellence of his government, not your own ingenuity or eloquence—your parts or learning. Guard, then, my brother, as against the most pernicious evil—guard, as for your very life, against converting the gospel ministry into a vehicle to exhibit your own excellence: or prostituting the doctrine of Christ crucified to the gratification of your pride or that it may be a pander to your praise. For who can estimate the magnitude of that guilt which is included in such conduct? Yet, with this enormous and horrible evil, I cannot forbear suspecting, many ministers are more or less chargeable. Nay, to the commission of this outrage on the honor of Christ and of grace, every minister should consider himself liable. For so polluted are our hands, that without grace preventing, we defile every thing we touch. So depraved are our hearts, that we are in danger of committing a robbery on the glory of our divine Lord, even when it is our professed business to exalt it.

"As, when entering on public devotion, you should endeavor to act becoming your character, under the notion of a guilty creature in audience with the King Eternal, and as a minister of Christ, whose business is to display his glory, so you are further to consider yourself as the servant of his Church. When standing up to address your people, it should ever be with an earnest desire to promote their happiness. They having chosen you to the pastoral office,—you having accepted their invitation, and being now solemnly ordained to the important service—that mutual agreement, and the interesting transactions of this day, should operate as a threefold motive to the faithful performance of your public work. Yes, you are bound affectionately to aim at doing them good, by laying divine truth before them in such a manner as is adapted to enlighten their minds, to affect their hearts, and to promote their edification.

Though the occasional exercise of your ministerial talents in other places may be both lawful and commendable, yet, as it is here only that you stand in the pastoral relation you ought, except in extraordinary cases, to fill this pulpit yourself, and not leave the deacons to procure supplies, in a precarious manner, while you are serving

some other community. It is here, as a public teacher, that your proper business lies; and here, at the usual times of assembling, your voice must be heard. When the pastor of a church discovers any inclination to avail himself of any pretext for being absent from his people, in order to serve others, he gives reason for suspicion, whatever his pretences may be, that either filthy lucre, or a love of popularity, has too much place in his heart; and that he accepted the pastoral office rather as an article of convenience, than as matter of duty. It is indeed, much to be lamented, that, though dissenting ministers in general justly exclaim against the non-residence and the holding of pluralities, which are so common among the clergy, yet the conduct of some pastors among the Nonconformists, makes near approaches to that of pluralities in our national establishment, and is a violation of pastoral duty.

You should seek, with peculiar care, to obtain the approbation of conscience in each of your labors; as appears by the following words. *"By manifestation of the truth, commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God."* This illustrious passage presents us with a view of Paul in the pulpit, and a very solemn appearance he makes. He has just been adoring in secret, at the feet of the Most High; and from converse with the Most Holy he is now going to address his fellow-sinners. Penetrated with the importance of his office, and the solemnity of his present situation he manifestly feels—he seems to tremble. Nor need we wonder: for the subject on which he is to speak, the object he has in view, and the witness of his conduct, are all interesting and solemn to the last degree. Truth, Conscience, and God—the most important and impressive thoughts that can enter the human mind—pervade his very soul. Evangelical truth is the object of his discussion; and the omniscient Holy One is the witness of his conduct. An example, this, which you, and I, and every minister of the word are bound to imitate. Make it your diligent endeavor, then, to obtain the approbation of conscience from all that hear you: for without deservings that, none of your public labors can be to your honor, or turn to your own account, in the great day of the Lord.—Booth's Pastoral Cautions.

#### A MOTHER'S AND A SISTER'S PRAYER ANSWERED.

Within a twelve month, there came from —, one of the West India Islands, to the United States, a man of business. He was in truth, a man of the world; deeply immersed in its cares, and prosperous in reaping a golden harvest; with which he vainly hoped, ere long, to be satisfied and happy. His mission led him to all the principal cities on our Atlantic borders; and in them to associate with a most respectable class of our merchants. He first visited a southern city; and while there, was, in the providence of God, to listen to the preaching of a zealous and devoted clergyman of the Protestant Episcopal church. His attention was arrested and his mind deeply solemnized with eternal realities. He visited intervening cities, and at length reached Boston. There he took lodgings in the — House. The impressions made by divine truth were not to be effaced from his heart, although he was much occupied with mercantile operations. He still thought of his soul, and began to set upon it a higher value than upon the world. He went to hear a faithful minister of the Methodist church, and his convictions of sin were heightened. He went again and again; till, by the blessing of God, and the operations of the Holy Ghost, he found a Saviour, and embraced him in faith, and became a joyful witness of his truth. Surrounded as he was by the world, on all sides, hearing constantly the din of its business, and the noise of its folly (miscalled pleasure), indeed engaged for a part of the day in the former, and associated at the meals, with many devoted to the latter, he did abstract his mind from worldly thoughts, so as to spend hours daily with his God, on his bended knees, seeking Divine illumination in prayer and reading his word.

He was now a changed man. He felt it within. He showed it in his very countenance and manners. Yes! and he was not made a witness for Jesus to be dumb! or to testify only on certain great occasions! Out of the abundance of his heart his mouth spake. He has now returned to his home, to carry a pearl of matchless price; and, in the benevolence which the gospel inspires, to use his utmost endeavors that those endeared to him by the ties of affection and blood may not receive the grace of God in vain. Nor will he be soon forgotten in your city, among the brethren who rejoiced over his repentance, or by those impatient individuals whom he sought in the ardor of his first love, to seek the Saviour he had found.

But what has all this to do with the prayers of a mother and a sister? Let me tell you, the man thus hopefully converted, is the son of a mother in Israel! and the brother of the wife of a missionary in India! The former has been for many years, an ornament in the church in England, and now stands waiting but to hear this blessed intelligence, that her son who was lost is found—who was dead is alive again; and like Simon of old, she will say, "Lord now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, for mine eyes have seen thy salvation." The latter was so in love with God's word, that to enjoy and be benefited with its glorious truths, she made the Hebrew language her study, that so she might read it in the characters in which it was originally penned.

Who can doubt that the prayers of that mother and that sister, going up continually for the son and the brother, widely separated from them as he was, were heard, and he was blessed in his soul on account of them? Mothers! who have impatient sons and daughters, pray for them. Sisters! who have brothers in love with this

world, go to God in faithful prayer for them; for the fervent, effectual prayer of the righteous availeth much.—PASTOR.

From the Southern Churchman.

How far Christian Denominations may safely co-operate in Conducting Religious Institutions.—There is so much good sense in the following remarks on this subject which we copy from a London Missionary paper, that we take pleasure in recommending it to our readers. We think it correctly lays down the rule which should determine the question proposed in the caption:

"The limit of combined religious action only include, with safety and peace, those cases where, as in the Bible Society, religious opinions are not at all called into question; or where, as in the Religious Tract Society, essential principles, common to all who act together, are alone brought forward and subordinate principles, which the parties do not agree, are pretermitted, as not necessary to salvation, though important to the full edification of the Church.

"Wisdom and charity, we conceive, require that all plans which cannot be placed, completely and practically, under one or other of these two heads, should be conducted exclusively by those who agree in all the great points of doctrine, and worship, and discipline, which are essential to the full purposes of their union. If the time should arrive, when the terms of communion in the Churches of Christ shall be so enlarged as to embrace those who are at present separated, there will then naturally follow a wide co-operation in religious labors; but it will still remain as we conceive, immovably true that members of different communions can act efficiently, harmoniously, and consistently together, only under one or other of the two cases which we have stated. The experience of our different societies fully bears us out in this view.

"In cases such as that of our Home Missionary Societies, where living agents must be employed in acting personally for religious ends on a living population, not only must topics be brought forward on which Churchmen and Dissenters are not agreed; but if it were possible and proper to merge these topics, yet that difficult task could not be entrusted to living agents of every habit of mind, speaking on the spur of the occasion, when it is found to require the calm deliberation of a body of thinking and candid men to prepare publications of such a description.

"To all the praises which are given to the mutual love of true Christians we most cordially subscribe. We desire to love every man who loves our Lord. We count our differences lighter than the dust in the balance, as compared with that faith, which the Holy Spirit awakens in the souls which He has renewed, and which works by love to all the commands and promises of God.—Where regeneration, and faith and love are—there God is! And with such men may our souls be gathered forever.

"It is not quite fair to draw captivating pictures of harmony and love, with an implication that these senses are realized among those only who merge their different views of worship and discipline, which yet are all unwisely indispensable to the full edification of the individual Christian and of the whole spiritual body. While human nature is what it is, and the Christian Churches retain their present terms of communion, our brethren so circumstanced must be more than human wholly to escape suspicions, heart-burnings and jealousies, and to feel themselves at once consistent and unimpeded in their actions; and we urge more limited co-operation on our brethren, because charity can be most confidently exercised and most fully maintained, when we act with those with whom we agree, and bid God speed to all who, with the preservation of all essential truth, do yet piously differ from us.

"We are well aware of the duty of laboring to be perfectly joined together in the same mind and the same judgment: for it is the want of this which imposes on Christians the necessity of these restraints on general co-operation. While, however, they continue short of this consummation, they may be joined as one in holy charity; and in proportion as they approach this unity of mind and judgment, they may be joined together in unity of holy action.

A Sensible Question—Mamma, said a child, my Sunday school teacher tells me that this world is only a place in which God lets us live a little while, that we may prepare for a better world. But, mother, I do not see any body preparing. I see you preparing to go into the country—and aunt Eliza is preparing to come here. But I do not see any one preparing to go to heaven. If every body wants to go there, why don't they try to get ready?—Juvenile Miscellany.

Give God the glory of all thy good, and leave for thyself only the shame and punishment of all thy evil.

#### New Books.

Harmony of Divine Truth by Williston, Fuller's Works, Gaston's Collections, Mrs. Heman's Works complete in 1 vol. Hookers Family Book of Devotion, Christian Brahman, Memoir of Mrs. Ellis, Nevins' Thoughts on Popery, Do. Practical Thoughts, The Marthas, by Philip, Boston on the Covenants, Doddridges Rise and Progress, Young Wife's Book, Daughters Own Book, The Hebrew Wife, For Sale at the Book Store, Cheraw, July 25th.

#### Books.

Rollin's Ancient History, Robertson's work's Marhall's life of Washington, Washington's writings by Sparks vols. 2, 3, 4, 5, 6—Ramsay's Universal History, Plutarch's lives, Mitford's Greece. Life and writings of John Jay, Bancroft's U. States. England and American, Rush's Memoranda.

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It is published at the low price of \$2. For this small sum subscribers get valuable and entertaining matter each week enough to fill a common book of 200 pages, and equal to 52 volumes a year, and which is estimated to be read, weekly by at least two hundred thousand people, scattered in all parts of the country, from Maine to Florida, and from the sea board to the lakes.—The paper has been now so long established as to render it too well known to require an extended prospectus, the publishers, therefore, will do no more than refer to the two leading daily political papers of opposite politics. The Pennsylvania says—"The Saturday Courier is the largest, and one of the best family newspapers in the Union;" the other, the Inquirer and Daily Courier, says, "It is the largest journal published in Philadelphia, and one of the very best in the United States." The New York Star says—we know nothing more liberal on the part of the dominant talents of our country, than their unexampled liberality in offering literary prizes."

The Albany Mercury of March 16th, 1836 says, "the Saturday Courier is decidedly the best Family Newspaper ever published in this or any other country, and its value is duly appreciated by the public, if we may judge its contents are agreeably varied, and each number contains more really valuable 'reading matter' than is published in a week in any daily paper in the Union. Its mammoth dimensions enable its enterprising proprietors, Messrs. Woodward & Clarke, of Philadelphia, to republish in its columns in the course of a year, several of the most interesting new works that issue from the British press; which cannot fail to give to it a permanent interest and render it worthy of preservation. To meet the wishes, therefore, of such of their subscribers as desire to have their numbers bound, they have determined on issuing an edition of the Courier in the quarto form, which will render it much more convenient for reading when it is bound in a volume and thus greatly enhance its value."

#### THE QUARTO EDITION.

Under the title of the PHILADELPHIA MIRROR, will commence with the publication of the Prizo Tale, to which was awarded the prize of \$100, written by Miss Leslie, editor of the splendid Annual the Token, and author of Pencil Sketches and other valuable contributions to American Literature. A large number of songs poems tales, &c. offered in competition for the \$500 premiums, will add value and interest to the succeeding numbers, which will also be enriched by a story from Miss Sedgewick author of Hope Leslie. The Linwoods, &c., whose talents have been so justly and extensively appreciated, both at home and abroad.

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